



Having a Sialogram

Your doctor has referred you for a sialogram. The information in this leaflet should explain what will happen before, during, and after this test and also answer any questions that you may have.

What is a sialogram?

A sialogram is an X-ray examination of the salivary ducts. You may be referred for this test if you are experiencing pain or swelling of the face, especially when you are eating. You have two pairs of salivary glands – the parotid salivary glands are found in the cheek area and the submandibular salivary glands are found in the floor of the mouth under your tongue. The salivary ducts carry saliva from the gland (where it is produced) to the inside of your mouth. The procedure for examining both types of salivary duct is the same.

During the test, a fine tube will be placed into the entrance of the salivary duct (inside the mouth) and a contrast agent (a special 'dye', which can be seen on X-ray images) will be injected. This will show whether there is any blockage or narrowing of the duct that could be causing your symptoms.

Before the sialogram

There is no special preparation for this test. However, you may be asked to remove earrings, necklaces, hair accessories, and dentures.

What will happen during the test?

Your test will be performed by a radiologist (specialist X-ray doctor). They will explain the procedure to you and you will have the opportunity to ask any questions. There will also be a nurse and a radiographer present throughout your test.

You will be given a small amount of a sharp lemon liquid to drink; this will activate the salivary glands and make the opening of the ducts easier to find. You will then be asked to lie down on the X-ray couch. A bright light will be shone into your open mouth and the radiologist will use a small metal instrument to find the opening of the salivary duct being examined. They will place a very fine tube into the duct and inject a small volume of contrast. The X-ray machine may come quite close to your face while images are being taken. You may feel some discomfort or pressure in the salivary gland while this injection takes place. A small amount of the contrast (dye) may overflow into your mouth – this has a bitter, metallic taste. Once the first images have been taken, you will be asked to repeat the mouthwash with the sharp lemon liquid. This will encourage the salivary duct to empty. Further X-ray images may then be taken.

The test will take between 5 and 10 minutes. You will be able to leave the department and return to your normal daily activities as soon as the test is finished.

When will I get the results?

You should not expect to get the results on the day of the test. However, the radiologist may give you some indication of their findings when the test is finished. They will issue a full report which will be sent back to the doctor that referred you within 7 to 10 days.

Are there any risks?

Side effects and complications from this test are very rare. Occasionally patients may suffer some localised irritation or inflammation of the salivary duct area where the tube has been inserted.

The salivary ducts are very small and it is sometimes not possible to insert the tube satisfactorily, which means the test cannot be performed. If this happens the radiologist may decide that you should have an ultrasound scan of the area instead, either on the same day or at a later date.

Having a Sialogram (continued)

All X-ray procedures involve exposure to ionising radiation in varying amounts. The use of radiation is strictly controlled and is kept to the minimum required. For this examination, the extra radiation is equivalent to what you would receive from the atmosphere (background radiation) over a period of around three months.

Who should I contact if I have any questions?

If you have any questions or concerns that are not answered by this leaflet, please contact the X-ray department on the telephone number given on your appointment letter. We will do our best to make your visit as pleasant as possible.